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THE ACTORS' GANG - ARMORY CENTER FOR THE ARTS – ARTWORX - COALITION FOR ENGAGED EDUCATION - INSIDEOUT WRITERS  
JAIL GUITAR DOORS - RHYTHM ARTS ALLIANCE - STREET POETS INC. - THE UNUSUAL SUSPECTS THEATRE COMPANY - WRITE

October 25, 2016

Dear Probation Oversight Work Group members,

Thank you again for the invitation to present the work of the Arts for Incarcerated Youth Network to the Oversight Work Group.

AIYN is an organization providing structure and coordination for the collaborative work of community-based organizations serving youth in the juvenile justice system. AIYN and our 10 member organizations coordinate high-quality programs that reduce replication and enhance cost-effectiveness and outcomes. We believe exceptional arts education can help provide alternatives to incarceration, build resiliency and wellness, eliminate recidivism, and transform the juvenile justice system. *We envision a future in which youth are empowered and the systems that serve them are transformed, using arts as a foundational strategy and catalyst for change.*

A growing body of research confirms that strong arts programming can be a cost-effective way to reduce youth delinquency and recidivism, and a growing body of research supports the conclusion that creativity is connected to important social and emotional development. This social emotional development is often a key need among youth in detention facilities – especially youth in Los Angeles County, where reduction in population is directly connected to increased need in mental health and social emotional support. There is a growing focus on the significance of arts programming in terms of transformation and effective preparation for community reentry.

We're pleased to share our progress and efforts, as well as the challenges and opportunities we see moving forward.

#### *Arts Integration*

With support from the Los Angeles County Department of Probation and in partnership with the Los Angeles County Arts Commission, AIYN currently coordinates among its members to deliver ongoing arts programming at ten juvenile detention sites across Los Angeles County. Programs runs in 12-week cycles, with classes twice a week for 90 minutes, ending in a culminating event/performance of learning. We are eager to expand to all sites, and this past session began field testing an "opt-out" vs. and "opt-in" model at three sites. We are also starting programming at all six Juvenile Day Reporting Centers across the County. We strongly support the continued expansion of this partnership, as we believe it provides more opportunities to integrate arts as a healing-informed strategy for both youth and the system itself. We are scheduled to provide experiential arts training to probation staff at three sites before the end of the year, and anticipate this training of staff will become part of our ongoing work. **We believe this is a critical strategy for long-term support of a culture change within Probation towards a restorative, healing-informed frame.** Additionally, we're exploring opportunities to leverage arts as part of a successful reintegration strategy, connecting young people to schools with strong arts education, opportunities for paid internships in the creative economy,

#### GOVERNING COUNCIL

DIANA ATTIAS, ATTIAS FAMILY FOUNDATION - FABIAN DEBORA, ARTIST - MELISSA DENTON, UNUSUAL SUSPECTS THEATRE COMPANY - CHRIS HENRIKSON, STREET POETS INC

ALEX JOHNSON, CHILDREN'S DEFENSE FUND, CA - MALIN MCKINLEY, COALITION FOR ENGAGED EDUCATION - JANICE POBER, SONY PICTURES ENTERTAINMENT  
KEREN TAYLOR, WRITE GIRL/BOLD INK - PETER WALDEN, RHYTHM ARTS ALLIANCE - SCOTT WARD, ARMORY CENTER FOR THE ARTS - MINDY VELASCO, INSIDEOUT WRITERS

and access to creative economy careers. We believe arts can and should be a *foundational* strategy for juvenile justice reform efforts, not just a feel-good add-on.

#### *VISTO clearances*

Many of our artists come from similar backgrounds to the youth they serve, and are the most effective advocates and mentors for youth in detention. Numerous studies have shown that peer mentorship (someone who has “been there”) is the most effective practice, yet the VISTO clearance process makes it nearly impossible for those who have successfully turned their lives around to support and engage youth. While there are important safety considerations, we strongly support a revised clearance process that would enable these key mentors and teaching artists to work with youth in detention settings. Additionally, we have found that some of our teaching artists who are cleared to work on site through LACOE need to go through a repeated, separate process for the VISTO clearance. This has created significant delays in programming, and illustrates an opportunity for greater coordination and streamlining between agencies.

#### *Need for Increased Communication*

We have also found on some sites that finding time to integrate programming can be challenging. Different agencies are often competing for minutes with the youth, leading to programming that is often ad hoc, sporadic, and/or repetitive. Increased communication among community-based agencies, and well as among Probation, DMH, and LACOE would create opportunities for more integrated, thoughtful supports and programming for youth. AIYN strongly supports efforts to improve communication and coordination.

#### *Opportunity for Reintegration Support*

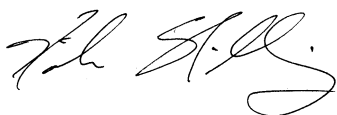
As stated above, we believe the arts can and should play a role in successful reentry for young people. We’re pleased that we’re currently working with Probation to design an “Arts Navigator” position that would be part of transition planning as young people return to their communities. Such a position could ensure youth who respond to arts programs remain connected to arts education and opportunities upon release, and are supported in a pathway to creative economy careers whenever possible. We would strongly support efforts to continue and expand such positions as an effective investment in long-term youth success.

#### *Strategic Plan for Juvenile Justice in LA County*

We would request that AIYN be included in developing a Strategic Plan for Juvenile Justice in LA County. Given our unique position, with teaching artists in nearly all detention sites, we feel we have unparalleled access to diverse practices from site to site, as well as connection to youth across multiple sites, thus feel we could be an asset to the planning.

Thank you again for your time and consideration.

Warm best,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Kaile Shilling'.

Kaile Shilling, Executive Director, Arts for Incarcerated Youth Network